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Chapter 7

The phenomenology of intersubjectivity and research with profoundly disabled children: Developing an experiential framework for analysing lived social experiences

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Profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) is a term used in the UK education system to refer to children with congenital neurological impairments that are said to result in global developmental delay. Traditionally, children with PMLD have been educated in special schools, and research informed by experimental psychology has aimed to develop intervention strategies and assessment tools to push children with PMLD through the so-called preverbal stages of development. There has been growing criticism of the dominance of psychological lenses in the PMLD field to the extent that they construct children's identities in terms of cognitive and behavioural traits (or lack of). Furthermore, the post-positivist forms of experimental research have been challenged for overlooking the lived experiences of children with PMLD.

To address the situation, this chapter aims to develop and examine a phenomenological framework that can guide researchers' reflection about the lived social experiences of children with PMLD. The chapter explores literature on the experiences of embodiment and relationality, and investigates how a description of the lived experience of intersubjectivity can provide a framework for making sense of, and legitimising those tacit, pre-reflective intuitions about the sociality of children with PMLD. The chapter draws from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and his proponents to develop this framework, which is "tested" through application to participatory fieldwork research data that the author is currently engaged in. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the strengths and limitations of this approach.

Introduction

Whilst there is some terminological variation when referring to people profound intellectual impairment, this chapter uses the term "profound and multiple learning disabilities" ("PMLD") because it is the preferred term within the geographical and professional context of the study being reported (i.e. schools in England). Furthermore, this chapter specifically discusses "*children* with PMLD" to signal that all participants were under the age of 16 and thus not legally recognised as adults in England.

It is estimated that between 9,000 (Salt 2010) and 14,700 (Emerson 2009) school-aged children have PMLD in England. Historically, the concept of PMLD is rooted in developmental psychology and refers to students said to experience global developmental delay stemming from neurological impairments

(Scope 2013). A review of the literature in this field has demonstrated that the cognitive abilities of children with PMLD are often compared to those of the neonate or infant insofar as children with PMLD are described as operating at the preverbal stages of development (Simmons and Watson 2014). For example, children with PMLD are understood as being pre-volitional (they lack free will or agency and cannot move with intent) (Farrell 2004); pre-contingency aware (they do not show awareness of cause-effect relationships) (Ware 2003); pre-intersubjective (they do not represent other people as subjects "like me", and cannot differentiate between subject and object); pre-symbolic or pre-intentional (they do not intentionally communicate meaning to others) (Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart 1998); and stereotypic in behaviour (they display reflexive, non-volitional behaviour) (Tang et al. 2003). In addition to profoundly delayed cognitive development, children with PMLD are also said to experience a range of additional impairments, including physical impairments (Neilson et al. 2000) and sensory impairments (Vlaskamp and Cuppen-Fonteine 2007).

Research in the PMLD field has traditionally drawn conceptual resources from behaviourist and cognitivist psychology to develop assessment tools and intervention strategies. Whilst behaviourist research has aimed to support the functional or adaptive skills of children with PMLD, cognitivist research has aimed to support children's emerging object cognition and social awareness (Simmons and Watson 2014). Methodologically, researchers have drawn from post-positivist forms of philosophy to develop experiments anchored in behavioural observation methods (e.g. applied behaviour analysis). Criticism has been levelled at interventionist research which treats children as objects of research rather than subjects to be consulted. Proponents of the latter view have drawn from constructivist philosophy to develop assessment tools such as "talking mats" that are said to reveal the preferences (likes and dislikes) of children with PMLD (Simmons and Watson 2017).

The current author has developed an alternative research approach to exploring the lived experiences of children with PMLD. This richly interpretivist methodology is rooted in longitudinal, participatory observation methods, working collaboratively with children with PMLD and teaching staff in context, and writing storied fieldnotes or "vignettes" about the daily lives of children with PMLD (Simmons and Watson 2014; 2017). The aim of this chapter is to build on this approach by developing an experiential framework for analysing vignette data pertaining to lived intersubjective experiences. Put differently, the aim is to develop and apply a phenomenological description of what it is like to experience the other as a social being, to engage with the other as a social being, and to be experienced as a social being by the other. In doing so, it is hoped that we can develop our methodological toolkit for exploring the lived social experiences of children with PMLD.

Project

Vignette data discussed in this chapter comes from a three-year research project[1] funded through a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship (2014-2017) which investigated the social inclusion of children with PMLD who experienced both special and mainstream educational opportunities. The research aimed to (1) investigate how different educational settings (mainstream and special) afforded different opportunities for social interaction, (2) examine how children with PMLD respond to different opportunities, and (3) explore how different opportunities impact on the growth of social awareness and communication skills of children with PMLD. The aim here is not to present the findings of the research, but to present data excerpts in order to illustrate how a phenomenological framework can make the data intelligible.

The methodology was designed to in order to develop understanding of the meaning of children's actions. Seven children participated in the research (aged 5-13). Each child was observed one day a week in a mainstream school and one day a week in a special school over a ten week period. Given the individualised behavioural repertoires of children with PMLD who participated in the study, the research required acts of interpretation and coming to know children through processes of familiarisation and engagement with the children over extended periods of time. It also required open and reciprocal dialogue with significant others (parents, teaching staff etc.) who knew the children intimately and could share their understandings of children's actions. The following sections describe the project, which made use of participatory and non-participatory observations, pre-observation focus groups and on-going dialogue with staff and parents. This approach has been described in more detail elsewhere (see Simmons and Watson 2014, 2017).

- Pre-observation focus groups and semi-structured interviews

Prior to undertaking fieldwork, the researcher facilitated a pre-observation focus group involving key members of school staff for each child (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants, speech and language therapists, etc.). The researcher also conducted a semi-structured interview with the parents of each child. The aim of the focus groups and interviews was to explore each child's interests, abilities and methods of communication by consulting those who knew the children intimately. This allowed for the development of an initial lens through which to interpret and understand actions of the child when observed. For example, staff and parents for one child ("Billy") described the subtle difference between rocking in distress and rocking in excitement. When rocking in distress, Billy's actions were intensive and accompanied by angry vocalisations, stiff limbs and his bottom being raised off the wheelchair seat. By contrast, when rocking in excitement Billy would be slouched and look directly at the exciting event or person. Both of these rocking behaviours were differentiated from Billy's generalised convulsive (tonic-clonic) seizures, which were described by his parents as "uncontrollable frantic wobbles" involving the whole body, with his lips sometimes turning blue. Concrete descriptions of children's

behaviours by significant others helped guide the researcher's observations and make the children's individualised behavioural repertoires more intelligible in the early days.

- Participatory observation

Observation in the PMLD field typically involves a distant-observer stance where the researcher employs a structured observation schedule. By contrast, the project being described in this chapter employed participatory observation methods. Participatory observation involves the researcher acting or participating in the lives of those he or she is trying to understand. By immersing himself or herself in the daily routines and activities of the children's lives, the researcher can become intuitively familiar with the routines and children's responses and experiences of them.

During the project, the researcher engaged in on-going participatory observation by acting as a teaching assistant for the children one day a week in a mainstream school and one day a week in a special school. The purpose of this participation was to allow for alternative ways of "getting to know" the children involved in the study by "being with" them (Morris 2003). Interacting with the children and supporting their learning in context alongside other teaching staff was one way of becoming familiar with the children's day (e.g. routines, interventions, behaviours etc.). This kind of observation also helped to develop trust and rapport between members of staff (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011) and provided opportunities for informal discussion with staff in real time. These informal conversations were central in developing interpretation insofar as the researcher was able to share and discuss his interpretations with staff members, ask questions and seek out staff members' expertise and wisdom (e.g. to resolve confusion about the meaning of newly observed or unexpected behaviours).

- Non-participatory observation and vignette-writing

Fieldwork data was composed of "vignettes" written during periods of non-participatory observation. Vignettes are rich and prosaic renderings of fieldnotes about social interactions. They have a story-like structure and adhere to chronological flow. Vignettes are restricted to a particular place, time and agent (or group of agents), and can vary from a few lines of descriptions to the length of a chapter (Miles et al. 2014). Erickson (1986) defined the vignette as:

> … a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life, in which the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time. This moment-to-moment style of description in a narrative vignette gives the reader a sense of being there in the scene (149-150).

When opportunities for children with PMLD to engage in social interaction were observed the researcher would write detailed, descriptive accounts of the observation as the interaction unfolded, paying attention to who initiated the interaction and how, the actions of the interactive participants over time and contextual variables such as place and time of interaction, the items involved in the interactions. Vignettes included micro-descriptions of children's changing facial expressions and body

movements, which were crucial in the early research stages as they helped the researcher develop a basic awareness of how a child expressed his or her emotions. This involved writing about where the child was looking, whether his or her eyebrows were raised, the shape of his/her mouth, how his/her head was tilted, what his/her arms and legs were doing, the noises he/she was making, etc.

Vignette-writing as research method is borne from an ethnographic tradition that avoids universal, objective truth and realism and is closer to the postmodern view of research which embraces a view of reality as participative and collectively constructed through shared engagement. To these ends, the vignettes were written to offer a rich, thick, descriptive piece of writing co-constructed out of the interplay between children's interactions with the world (which included the researcher) and both the researcher's and staff member's interpretation of that interaction. For methodological and ethical reasons it was important to locate subjective understandings in the written text as this was discussed with significant others in order to avoid potentially misrepresenting the children. The vignettes were read by others who knew the children or who observed the event, and the readers offered their own interpretation through informal conversations (e.g. between lessons or in the playground) which were essential to help deepen understanding of the observations.

Hundreds of vignettes were written and, through this on-going member-checking process, the researcher learned to "see" the children from the perspectives of others who worked with them. However, this process of interpretation operated bi-directionally insofar as the researcher's interpretations presented to staff challenged their preconceptions which led them to reconsider and reconstruct their own understandings. This led to on-going, reflective dialogue during the course of the research and negotiations of interpretations.

Two examples of vignettes are given below. The first person narration is kept in order to keep a sense of authenticity. The aim of the presentation of vignettes is not to present conclusions about the findings of the research, but to provide a space in which to "test" an emerging phenomenological framework developing later in the paper.

Vignettes

The two vignettes below are excerpts of field notes written during 2015-2016. They involve "Amy" who was five years old, and "Finn" who was eight. Both attended a PMLD unit in a special school, and went to age-appropriate mainstream classes one day a week for the purpose of the research project. In each of the vignettes I felt that I was engaged in an interaction that revealed the social awareness of the children.

Vignette 1: Amy

Lovely interaction with Amy this morning! I entered the classroom and began walking to the cloakroom. I noticed Amy out the corner of my eye (to the right of me) – head up, back straight, big wide eyes as if she was saying 'Hello! Look at me!' I sensed that she was trying to pull me into her world before I could [verbally] acknowledge her presence (well done, Amy!) I turn, but before I say 'hello' she gives me a big beautiful smile which makes me smile back. My words come out jumbled (I was about to say 'Good morning, Amy' but for some reason changed part way through in order to comment on Amy's smile, and it came out "Good-smile-gailly'. I laugh at myself (felt a little embarrassed) and Amy laughs out loud, which makes me laugh even more. We chuckle together. TAs [Teaching Assistants] turn around and comment on what a lovely mood Amy is in today. She stares at me with bright, sparkly eyes, as if anticipating that I will do something amusing. I dump my coat and bag beside her and start chatting. She maintains eye contact and groans excitedly. I waffle a bit then see the blue spikey rubber ball on the floor (same as Caleb's), give it a shake and show Amy. The ball flashes and she turns her head to face away and remains still so I thought that I'd lost her attention. She then starts snorting as if trying to hold in a laugh. I move and sit beside her so I can see her face - her face is red, saliva bubbles froth out of her mouth and she howls with laughter! (Ha!) I ask if she's teasing me but she refuses to make eye contact. Happy moans. She then appears to phase out and rubs her nose. It's time for register so she is wheeled to the table. [Have I been teased like this before?]

Vignette 2: Finn

Finn's TA asked me to help Finn with his lip balm. Staff have been keen to develop Finn's sense of agency (as a learning objective) and have been encouraging him to apply his own lip balm. This involves rubbing the balm on Finn's finger and encouraging him to raise it to his lips and apply it independently. The TA places a small pot of strawberry balm near Finn's nose and encourages him to smell it. 'Oh strawberry, Finn! Your favourite!' No sign of nostrils moving, but he arches his back, takes his feet off the footplates and straightens his legs (was this in response to the sweet strawberry smell?). TA saw him licking his lips (I missed this). TA tells Finn that I will be helping him

today: 'Show Ben how good you are, Finn!'. I chat to him too – tell that I'm excited to see him. Happy groan from Finn. Following TA's instructions, I rub Finn's finger in the lip balm (his arm was resting on the tray attached to his wheelchair). I hold Finn's forearm and slowly guide it to his mouth. What was interesting is that I *felt* him accept me and our bodies appeared to negotiate bodily space. When I first moved Finn's arm he recoiled a bit (moved his arm towards his chest briefly - startle response?) I spoke to him and he almost instantly relaxed and let me *help him* guide his arm. He was moving roughly in the right direction (from chest to mouth) and I could feel him trying to move, but he also relaxed and let me guide him at times in a sort of 'toing and froing' motion, like we were both trying to traverse some sort of motor space between his chest and his mouth, or like he was trying to incorporate my movements into his. It was like he couldn't connect the two spaces independently but was happy to be steered back on track. When the finger touched his lips he licked the balm rather than rub his lips with his finger. We repeated the exercise several times. Teacher comes over to watch and explains that he is happy to open his mouth but doesn't seem to know what to do with the balm when it gets to his lips.

In the following sections a phenomenological framework will be developed. The framework will then be applied to the above vignette later in order to examine the extent to which it illuminates the structure of intersubjectivity contained in the vignettes.

Developing a phenomenological framework for understanding intersubjectivity

A phenomenological description of intersubjective awareness may appear paradoxical: it involves articulating something which, in essence, is pre-personal and operates *beneath* reflective consciousness in order to give rise to meaningful experience (which can be the object of reflection after the fact). In other words, the phenomenology of intersubjectivity is one that attempts to describe that which is tacitly presupposed, that which gives origin, structure and meaning to experience, and that which is not in itself directly experienced but rather *discovered* upon reflection. It is important to note here that the aim of this chapter is not to discover structures of experience, but to develop a framework based on contemporary literature in the phenomenology of sociality (e.g. Szanto and Moran 2016). This in turn can inform reflection insofar as it allows the current author to trace the emergence of experiential moments where it is simply "known" that the other (in this case, the child with PMLD) is intersubjectively aware of the current author in the context of the author's research project. It is

suggested that if this tracing can be possible, the phenomenological framework can help validate or authenticate how and why the author feels that something is the case, rather than simply ascertain that something is the case because the author experienced or felt it to be so. To put it differently, the aim is to explore how the structure of the researcher's intersubjective awareness during engagement with children with PMLD can provide an experiential form of evidence that children with PMLD are intersubjectively aware.

In the following discussion a thematic review of the literature regarding the phenomenology of intersubjectivity will take place in order to develop an experiential framework to analyse the vignettes above.

- Non-inferential awareness

A key theme in the phenomenology of intersubjectivity is that experience of the other's social being is a *non-inferential form of awareness*, meaning that we do not typically cognise or calculate the existence of self-awareness in others. Rather, we automatically recognise it through perception of the other's actions, what Schutz (1972) refers to as "signitive apprehension" (100). When observing another person "[m]y intentional gaze is directed right through my perceptions of his bodily movements to his lived experiences lying behind them and signified by them" (ibid.).

- Being-in-the-world

Furthermore, we do not simply perceive individuals in abstraction from their environments, but instead perceive people directly as a power to perform in a given situation. The basic unit of social experience is the other person as a *being-in-the-world*. Being-in-the-world is a concept that relates an embodied subject to his or her tasks. The world is made meaningful to the subject in terms of how it affords particular kinds of actions, and my perception of the other is one that is *situated*, as Romdehn-Romluc (2011) states: "[…] I am aware of the other's body and environment as complementary parts of one whole" (139).

Part of the reason why we perceive the behaviour of the other as meaningful is because we immediately experience that action as an intelligent way of engaging with the world. As Merleau-Ponty (2002) notes, the self perceives the other through the body, and in doing so discovers that the other's body is "a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, and a familiar way of dealing with the world" (412). Observing the behaviour of the other can transform the observer's experience of the world:

> No sooner has my gaze fallen upon a living body in processes of acting than the objects surrounding it immediately take on a fresh layer of significance: they are no longer simply what I myself could make of them, they are what this other pattern of behaviour is about to make of them" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 411-422)

We experience the other's agency as a kind of pull or drag – the body of the other presents as a "vortex" (ibid.: 412) which my own world is sucked into, and in doing so the world emerges as something that is shared. The behaviour of the other is thus not simply a "mere fragment of the world" (ibid.) but a way of elaborating the world, or a certain viewpoint. In other words, social experience can be mutually elaborating - the experience of the other can change my experience of my world and vice versa.

So far discussion has explored non-inferential dimensions of intersubjectivity. This has focused on what may be dubbed a passive dimension of experiencing other people. However, there is a dimension that is very much active, and through which originality and creativity flourish leading to a new sense of a self and other. We do not simply watch others and non-inferentially grasp their meanings – we engage and communicate with others.

- Unpredictability and shared control

When we engage in a conversation with another person, we do not know exactly how the conversation will unfold and the direction it will take (unless we are reading from a script). In fact, a key theme in the phenomenological literature concerns both joint affect and *limited or shared control* I experience during social interactions. For example, in the experience of dialogue, "there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 413). This intertwining of subjectivities into a third space, or common ground "of which neither of us is the creator" (ibid.), hints not just at the co-constitution of a space, but the way in which such a space influences our thoughts and actions. What is important here is the idea that the shape and meaning of interaction is co-constituted in the moment, that our words and thoughts are drawn from us during the dialogue and that the process and content of the dialogue are shared. "We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity" (ibid.). We can observe the other interacting with the world, and even focus on bits of behaviour (which, in essence, is at the heart of scientific methodology in the PMLD field e.g. applied behaviour analysis), but by *interacting* with the other person a shared space emerges and even a shared being emerges. As Merleau-Ponty (2002) puts it: "Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world (ibid.)". He also states: "[w]hat we do in effect is to iron out the I and the Thou in an experience shared by a plurality, thus introducing the impersonal into the heart of subjectivity and eliminating the individuality of perspectives" (144). Such interactions can lead to new experiences and draw "thoughts which I had no idea I possessed" (ibid.). It is only after the interaction, upon reflection, that I integrate the experience into the singular and recognise the thoughts as "mine" as opposed to "ours".

- Mutual incorporation

Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009) explain the above in terms of social interaction having two centres of gravity. Centres of gravity oscillate between dominance and submission during the interaction. When

two people interact, it is possible that the co-ordination of movements, gestures, gazes, etc. overrides individual intent resulting in a shared sense-making act. This may be experienced as the interactive process gaining its own centre of gravity: "Each of them behaves and experiences differently from how they would do outside of the process, and meaning is co-created in a way not necessarily attributable to either of them" (476). Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009) refer to this process in terms of *mutual incorporation*, defined as "a reciprocal interaction of two agents in which each lived body reaches out to embody the other" (474). For example, mutual incorporation can be used to described eye contact which takes the form of a "fight of gazes": I may feel the other's gaze as a pull, a suction, or also as an arrow that hits me and causes a bodily tension; I may feel his gaze right on my face (e.g. when blushing with shame); I may be fascinated by the gaze or withstand it, "cast it back" etc. How I react (e.g. blushing) to the gaze of the other begins to shape his next action. This non-inferential process is immediate; it does not rely on internal representations and mental simulation of the other's anger. Rather, we immediately feel tense, angry or threatened by the impact of the gaze.

- Gesture and symbolic communication

For Merleau-Ponty, a gesture tacitly becomes symbolic when it affects the behaviour of the other in such a way that the other's behaviour becomes an extension of the behaviour of the self who is gesturing:

> The sense of the gestures is not given, but understood, that is, recaptured by an act on the spectator's part. The whole difficulty is to conceive this act clearly without confusing it with a cognitive operation. The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 215).

Marratto (2012) explains that what enables a gesture to become a sign is that it comes to function as a reliable indicator of another's subsequent movement. This requires that the person making the gesture is able to recognise another person's movement as a sequel to the previous gesture. This happens because the previous gesture motives the gesturer's own continuation of action.

- A/symmetry and the power to reckon with the possible

Finally, summery and asymmetry are core themes in Merleau-Ponty's (2002) phenomenology of intersubjectivity. The experience of intersubjectivity is the experience of being one of many selves who share a world. "Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world (413)". Romdehn-Romluc (2011) argues that, to experience the other as a subject (rather than an object) I must experience the other like I experience myself: "Merleau-Ponty seems to understand symmetry to

require that I experience myself and others as being the same sort of beings, and that my experience does not present either of us as privileged" (137).

While symmetry plays an important part in the experience of the other, there are also times of asymmetry, or the "power to reckon with the possible" (Romdehn-Romluc 2011: 93). The physical world becomes an environment (*Umwelt*) when we make sense of it and ourselves through action, for example in terms of how the environment affords us opportunities to interact. However, we can choose to act or not act, we have agency and a degree of freedom. We are always already in communication with the social world, but we can also choose to shy away from it, ignore it and disengage. Because we are part of the social world we can turn away from it, and self-consciousness is this expression (Romden-Romluc 2011). Furthermore, whilst experiential symmetry is a core feature in interaction contexts, breakdowns in symmetry can occur when unforeseen events cause us to reflect about the interaction event (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009). In other words, during the interactional flow symmetry can break and we are reminded of our own individual subjectivities – we may be conversing, but the other's opinions starkly contrast with our own and force us to reflect.

Application of phenomenological framework

In the previous section a thematic review of the phenomenology of intersubjectivity was performed in order to develop a framework for analysing lived intersubjective experience. This framework will now be applied to the two vignettes presented earlier in the chapter to assess the efficacy of this framework.

Vignette 1 begins with a sense of the researcher being sucked into an interaction with the participant called Amy. The researcher noticed Amy in his peripheral vision and immediately changed his originally intended direction and purpose - from heading to the cloakroom to turning towards Amy in order to greet her. ("I noticed Amy out of the corner of my eye […] head up, back straight, big wide eyes as if she was saying 'Hello! Look at me!' I sensed that she was trying to pull me into her world before I could [verbally] acknowledge her presence"). Amy's gesture (her smile) automatically elicits a smile from the researcher. The researcher is surprised by Amy's alertness and it is as if she draws from the researcher a different verbal greeting from the one that he attempted to deliver: instead of saying 'Good morning,' the researcher attempted to compliment Amy's smile partway through the sentence. The researcher uttered 'Good-smile-gailly' and felt embarrassed after. All of this happens in a matter of seconds. The researcher and Amy enter into a phase of shared emotions – they both laugh and each person's enjoyment enriches the other ("I laugh at myself […] and Amy laughs out loud, which makes me laugh even more"). Arguably, what emerges here is a sense of symmetry. Following Zahavi and Salice (2016), it appears that the researcher and Amy were both laughing at the researcher's vocalisation - there was interdependence, joint affect, and the emotion was experienced as being shared (the researcher and child were laughing together). There is a limited sense of control during the

interaction, at least on the researcher's behalf, hence his fumbling phraseology and surprise at being teased. This is perhaps the first time that Amy has teased the researcher ("Have I been teased like this before?"). During the interaction the researcher felt that Amy was staring at him "as if anticipating that I will do something amusing […]". The researcher shows Amy a spikey blue ball and Amy looks away ("She stares at me with bright, sparkley eyes" [then] "turns her head to face away and remains still"). The researcher feels that Amy's has lost interest in him and/or the ball, but she then "starts snorting as if trying to hold in a laugh" until she eventually erupts with laughter. "I ask if she's teasing me but she refuses to make eye contact" and emits "happy moans". For Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009), the meaning that emerges from social interaction is original in the sense that no single individual can lay claim to it. Rather, it is created through the interaction process itself. This is what Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009) consider to be authentic joint or participatory sense-making and give humour as an example. Humour, they say, can arise from a "counter-intentional event in the interaction, for example a mishap or mismatch. Think of a child handing over an object to her father and, because of his hesitation, quickly taking it back. In this way, a game of teasing may emerge" (477). In Vignette 1 It is unclear if the researcher is the catalyst for the teasing sequence or whether Amy is practising a behavioural sequence learned elsewhere. However, the researcher felt that she was teasing, though she may have been simply declining the object then laughed at the researcher's presence once more.

Compared to Amy's interaction in Vignette 1, Finn's interaction with the researcher in Vignette 2 is qualitatively different in nature. It involves the researcher helping Finn by dabbing lip balm onto Finn's finger, and guiding his finger to his lips. The interaction is not built around a teasing game, but is of an intercorporeal nature and involves a sharing physical space. The researcher is left with a distinct impression of sharing or negotiating movement. For Merleau-Ponty (2002), in the same way that the parts of my body together make a complete system - the "corporeal schema" (164) -, my body and the body of the other also make a complete system - what may be dubbed the "intercorporeal schema". The researcher observing Finn had previously seen TAs (Teaching Assistants) guide Finn's finger to his lips and perform this daily routine. As a distant rather than a participatory observer the researcher assumed that Finn was largely *passive* during the routine. However, on becoming a participant the researcher's understanding of Finn was enriched through his embodiment. Using concepts derived from the phenomenological framework developed above, we see several key features at work. At first Finn is largely passive – he lets the researcher rub the balm on Finn's finger, but when the researcher begins to raise Finn's arm and Finn recoils it is unclear whether this is a "startle response", a volitional movement, or an intentional/symbolic signal meaning "no". However, upon hearing the researcher's voice Finn "almost immediately relaxes" and lets the researcher guide his arm. Soon enough a sense of mutual incorporation emerges (a sense of two lived bodies reaching out to embody the other). When Finn moves his fingers towards his mouth the researcher stops guiding Finn, but when Finn begins to move off-track, the researcher gently guides Finn and Finn lets the researcher take over the movement before picking it up again. ("I felt him accept me, and our bodies appeared to negotiate bodily space […] in a

sort of to-ing and fro-ing motion, like we were both trying to traverse some sort of motor space between his chest and his mouth"). This sense of intertwined volitions is strong and surprises the researcher – Finn is incorporating the trajectory of the researcher's movement into his own and vice-versa. Through this a sense of a third space emerges which emanates from Finn and the researcher and yet neither of the interactive partners are in complete control. There is a sense of the researcher's gesture becoming symbolic insofar as the researcher can read his gesture in Finn's bodily movements and sees Finn's movement as a continuation of the researcher's movement. (This begins when Finn relaxes after hearing the researcher's words and continues in the way Finn takes up the researcher's suggested direction of movements). Similarly, it may be argued that Finn's willingness to move independently and the researcher's willingness to stop steering Finn is confirmation that Finn's gestures (i.e. his volitional powers) are recognised as symbolic by the researcher's body. Whilst the feeling or awareness of the agency of Finn is non-inferential and accompanies an emerging sense of "we", the vignette also demonstrates that the researcher is partly forced back into himself as a reflective subject when the researcher questioned the meaning of Finn's behaviours (and the efficacy of the researcher's own attempts to guide Finn). This was discussed above in terms of experiential symmetry and asymmetry. It may be argued that Finn's initial recoil demonstrates his powers to reckon with the possible.

Concluding discussion

This chapter has attempted to develop and examine a phenomenological framework that can guide reflection about lived intersubjective experience. It is the first attempt at developing such a framework in the PMLD field and is motivated by a desire to challenge deficit-based accounts of children with PMLD whilst legitimising the researcher's intuitive experiences of children with PMLD as socially aware. The strength of the chapter lies in the extent to which it articulates a novel framework for guiding reflection about the structure of social experience in order to explain how and why we immediately experience children with PMLD as social. In doing so, it is hoped that we can build an experiential evidence base regarding the social awareness of children with PMLD.

Whilst the idea of a framework is novel (at least in the PMLD field), the framework itself has not been significantly developed. In addition to the need for further synthesis of phenomenological literature on the topic (to draw out more themes), there is a need to apply the framework to more data excerpts in order to test the framework's explanatory power. Furthermore, the framework is being applied at the end of the data collection phase of a research project which, methodologically, has involved intensive and richly interpretivist forms of working with people with PMLD in context over 10 week blocks (Simmons and Watson 2014, 2017). Given this, there is a need to theorise how the process of familiarisation and working with children and teaching staff in context shapes our experiences, and how this directly influences the experience of sociality of children with PMLD. Phenomenologically, this has been described by Taipale (2016) as a shift from typification to

individuation, meaning that whilst we rely on stereotypical identities to inform our empathic relation with strangers on a daily basis, we learn to see through typified identities and develop intimate, personal knowledge through regular engagement with others. This intimate knowledge becomes sedimented in our experience and leads to an enriched and personalised empathic stance with those that we know well. How this relates to the framework has yet to be theorised and will be one area to be developed in the future.

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